

THE AMERICAN
NATIONAL PREACHER.

No. 10. Vol. 9.] NEW YORK, MARCH, 1835. [WHOLE No. 106.

SERMONS CLXXXIV. AND CLXXXV.

DELIVERED IN THE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY AT ANDOVER, FEBRUARY 1, 1835.

BY LEONARD WOODS, D. D.

ON THE DEATH OF LYMAN, MUNSON, AND OTHERS.

Heb. 12: 10, 11.—*For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness unto them who are exercised thereby.*

THE difference between the chastisements which we receive from God, and those we receive from earthly parents, is here presented to view as worthy of the most grateful acknowledgment. Even the best earthly parents have a mixture of imperfection in their feelings towards their children, and especially when they administer correction. But our heavenly Father has unmingled, perfect goodness. And he exercises this goodness whenever he visits his children with chastisement. He chastises them because he loves them. The Apostle, in the context, suggests another important thought, which relates particularly to our duty. If, notwithstanding the imperfect goodness of earthly parents, their children reverence them, and submit to their correction; how much more should we reverence our heavenly Father, and submit to his chastisement, administered, as it always is, in infinite wisdom and love, and designed for our spiritual profit.

This subject is introduced at the present time on account of the mournful events which have recently taken place in the circle of our Christian friends. Since the commencement of our academic year, we have received the tidings of the death of five young ministers, who were lately members of this Institution. Three of them died of sickness in our own land, and two by the hand of violence in a foreign land.

These awakening dispensations, dear brethren and friends, are addressed particularly to us. And if we open our ears to the monitory voice of these providences, and by fervent prayer seek the influence of the Holy Spirit, we shall experience the blessed effects of divine chastisement.

Wishing to render the occasion as profitable as may be, I shall take the liberty to apply the subject to different classes of persons, and to press upon their notice severally, those particular views which are suggested by the late mournful events.

I shall first apply the subject to *the members of this Institution*. The beloved young men, whose early death we have been called to mourn, recently lived, as you now do, within these consecrated walls. Here they pursued their studies, and were constant at our daily exercises. They joined with us in our morning and evening devotions, and assembled with us to worship God in the sanctuary, and to commemorate the dying love of Jesus. They had entered upon the active duties of that holy calling, for which you are now preparing. One of them had just preached his *first sermon*, which proved to be his *last*. Affecting, indeed, is the departure of so many young ministers in so short a time, and in such a manner. The great question with you is, how you shall profit by these affecting dispensations; what lessons they are designed to teach you, and what blessings they are adapted to secure.

Let me say, then, that these dispensations impressively inculcate the importance of *Christian diligence*. They remind you that the time is short, and urge you to do with your might whatsoever your hand findeth to do. Could those brethren, who have so soon closed their labors on earth, speak to you now, they would certainly exhort and press you to apply yourselves in earnest to every duty, to make the most intense efforts to cultivate your minds, to acquire useful knowledge, and to fit yourselves for your sacred calling. They would tell you, that the greatest diligence and ardor which they ever exhibited here in pursuit of their object, instead of being excessive, fell far below the proper mark. I have no words to convey to your minds the impression which I have, of the vast importance of diligence and ardor in theological students. It is to this, far more than to original talents, or to advantages for education, that the attainments and usefulness of men are owing. If you, who are here preparing for the ministry, would all apply yourselves to the business of theological study with proper diligence and zeal, casting off all indolence, keeping the powers of your minds fully awake, and under the right guidance in your daily employments, watchfully guarding against all hindrances,—if you would come to this,—my heart swells with joy to think what you might *be*, and what you might *do*. Your improvements while in this seminary would be double, yea, four-fold, to what is common; and your usefulness afterwards might be increased in a like proportion. Even if your life should be short, like that of those who have so soon been taken away,—if only a few years should be allotted to you; still, in those few years, you might accomplish as much as is generally done in a long life. And if the major part of you should

be continued in active service to the common age of ministers, who can tell the amount of good you might accomplish for the cause of Christ? Your acquisitions here made, and your habits of diligence here formed, all carried into your sacred calling, would, under God, produce such results, that your fellow-beings would be filled with wonder to see what a few men can do. What better use, then, can you make of these mournful dispensations, than to regard them as incitements to increased diligence and zeal in the appropriate occupation of theological students,—diligence proportioned to the greatness of the object before you,—diligence rightly directed, suited to the measure of your health, and wisely distributed among your various duties. Such diligence is imperatively required of you by the precepts of God's word, and by the admonitions of his providence; and, coming out to view as the prominent characteristic of this Institution, it might prove a salutary example to other seminaries, exciting them to exercise a higher degree than before of the same Christian virtue.

In the second place, these events of providence may help to furnish a just answer to several important questions which frequently arise among students, and which are sometimes answered without due consideration. One of these questions is, *what should students make their first and chief business during their residence in a Theological Seminary?* Had the young ministers lately deceased a voice to speak to you on this subject from the eternal world, they would exhort you to make that your chief business here, which is in reality the chief business of life. And what is this, taken in a personal view, but to repent, to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, and to secure an inheritance among them who are sanctified? You will by and by tell your fellow-men, and will tell them truly, that this is *their* great concern. It is equally *yours*, and *yours now*. Amid the variety of objects which solicit your attention, you may be tempted to neglect your own soul, and to substitute something else in the place of personal piety. Consider, then, how you would feel on this subject if you expected to die in three months, or in three years, after leaving the Seminary. And if you knew that you were to live *thirty* years, what reason would you have for any difference of feeling? When the time of your departure arrives, whether sooner or later, you will know for a certainty, that salvation was always your great concern. Your judgment will then be right. These shadows will all be dissipated; delusions will be gone; and objects will be presented before you in the light of truth. There never was a sober man who, in view of approaching death, had not a perfect persuasion, that the salvation of his soul was infinitely more important to him, than all other interests, and who did not feel, that reason and truth, as well as the authority of God, require every man to strive with all his heart to enter in at the strait gate; and to cut off

a right hand, and pluck out a right eye, and, if necessary, to sacrifice every earthly pleasure, for the sake of eternal salvation. Place yourselves in imagination, where you will soon be in fact, near the close of your probation, with death and the judgment just before you ; and you will have the sentiment fixed deep in your hearts, that the care of the soul is the one thing needful for you, while you are members of the Seminary, and at every other period of your life ; and that, if you neglect this, you neglect what is more important to you than all things else, and are guilty of a folly and a sin, for which no tears or sufferings can ever atone.

It is also obvious, that the present care of your soul is a duty which you owe not only to yourselves, but to your fellow-men ; inasmuch as it is the best way, and the only way, to prepare yourselves for the highest degree of usefulness. Such I well know was the sentiment of those devoted young men who have so soon finished their earthly labors. And the sentiment is most evidently just. Suppose a theological student says within himself: *I am so deeply engaged in cultivating my intellectual powers, and in acquiring knowledge of the various subjects connected with my future profession, that I have little time for prayer, and improvement in spiritual religion ; and as I am proceeding in this way for the sake of fitting myself to do good, I hope I shall be excused for my neglect of personal piety.* Such a student has fallen into a mistake which is most pernicious in its tendency, and which neither Christ, nor the church, nor his own conscience will ever excuse. What ! shall a man forsake God to prepare himself to serve God ? Shall he neglect his duty to qualify himself to perform it ? Shall he turn his back upon the cause of Christ, to qualify himself most successfully to promote it ? Shall he forsake prayer, that he may be fitted to teach others to pray ? It is utter absurdity and sin. The very benevolence which prompts a man to prepare himself to do good, will prompt him to seek first of all to abound in the fruits of the Spirit. A student who cultivates his understanding, and neglects his heart, is not influenced by a pure desire to do good. He is influenced by worldly wisdom, by ambition, by selfishness.

But there is another question which the present occasion may help you satisfactorily to answer. Suppose the paramount importance of practical piety to be admitted ; *what are the particular branches of intellectual improvement which demand the chief attention of theological students ?* Could you have put this question to our deceased friends a short time before their death, what think you would have been their reply ? Or suppose that, within one or two years after entering on your profession, you yourself should be laid on a dying bed, and that a younger brother of yours, about to join a theological seminary, should ask you, what particular studies will be most im-

portant, and what branches of knowledge ought to command his chief attention; can you doubt what answer ought to be given to such an inquiry? Those studies, you would say, are most important, and most worthy of attention, which are most intimately related to the great interests of religion:—those which lead most directly to the knowledge of the word of God, and which will help you most fully to understand the essential truths of Christianity, and most effectually to teach them to others; those, in a word, which will fit you to do most towards accomplishing the grand object for which the Savior came down from heaven, and lived and died.

There is one more question, which the present occasion may help you to answer: namely, *what are the things which theological students ought most carefully to avoid?* Could this question have been proposed to our departed friends during their last days on earth, how united and forcible would have been the answer from their lips! How earnestly would they have warned and intreated you to avoid every thing in disposition, in thought, in word, and in deed, every thing in public and every thing in private, which is forbidden by the holy precepts of revelation, or which would interfere with your growth in knowledge and grace, or your usefulness to the church. Your own experience has taught you, that there are certain companies and amusements, certain kinds of reading and conversation, certain emotions and trains of thought, certain indulgencies of the natural appetites, certain kinds of business, and certain modes of doing business, which prove hindrances to study, to prayer, and to spiritual enjoyment, and bring pollution to the soul. Every thing of this nature should be avoided with more resolution and vigilance, than that which would destroy your health or your life. Do nothing which would leave a bad impression on your character or your heart, and lay a foundation for regret and sorrow in after time. Keep yourselves free from the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye, and the pride of life. Do nothing to defile *the temple of God; which temple ye are.*

Turn your attention now to another point, on which the present occasion may give you serious instruction. Those five brethren, whose early death has been announced, have been subjected to a decisive trial as to *the soundness of their conversion.* They now know for a certainty, whether their hope of salvation was well founded. The time is near, when *your* hope will be tried in like manner. A *sincere* repentance, a *sound* conversion, prepares men to die, and to appear before God. But a spurious conversion, a *superficial* religion, though it may answer for worldly purposes, and may bear the test of a worldly inspection, will be worthless in a dying hour, and will vanish like a vapor at the judgment seat of Christ. Consider this subject now, while a mistake may be corrected. You are soon to go forth to the duties and trials of the ministry. And you are soon to go forth to

meet the Lord Jesus, the almighty Savior and Judge. Behold, he cometh. Arise, and trim your lamps; and take heed that you be not like the foolish virgins, who found, too late, that they had no oil in their lamps. May not theological students and ministers be found, who have nothing but a false conversion, a counterfeit religion, and whose hope, quivering and ready to fail even now, will perish for ever when God taketh away the soul? The voice of those who have lately gone before you into the eternal world, and who know what it is to have their hope tried by him who searches the heart,—their voice now cries aloud in your ears: “Ye who are studying where *we* lately studied, and praying in those closets, and those public places, where *we* lately prayed, and are about to enter on that sacred work which *we* began and ended so soon; remember, that *it is a serious thing to die*. Examine yourselves, then, whether ye be in the faith. And do this with your eye turned to the hour of death, and to that day of account, when God will bring to light every work, and every secret thing, whether it be good or bad.”

Finally: Endeavor to make these affecting events the occasion of *special advancement in the divine life*—the occasion of rising to higher fervor and constancy in your devout affections, and in your religious duties, than you have ever attained to before. There have been special seasons in the life of eminent Christians, when, under the impression of some divine truth, or of some remarkable providence, with the gracious help of the Holy Spirit, they have made uncommon progress in the work of religion; when they have gone forward in their warfare against sin with new courage, and have gained victory upon victory in rapid succession;—seasons when they have done more to subdue their evil propensities and to grow in grace, in a few days, than they had done in years before. Could your five departed brethren speak to you on this subject, methinks they would say: “Oh, that our early death may be the means of raising you to higher degrees of faith, and love, and devotion! Then we shall feel that we did not die in vain.” Members of this sacred Institution, turn your thoughts in earnest to this momentous concern. Let all low, earthly desires die away, and your souls be fired with holy, heavenly ardor. And let it be your humble but firm resolve, that you will impartially look into your spiritual state, and see what has been done, and what remains to be done, in your great work for eternity, and that, in reliance on divine help, you will make this a season of special advancement in your religious character; that you will strive with all your heart to attain to that habitual warmth and elevation of piety, which you have heretofore contemplated only as a distant and almost unapproachable object of desire, and to those holy joys, for which you have only panted before. Perseveringly do this, and you will learn from happy experience, as well as from the holy Scriptures, that God is able to do exceeding abundantly for you above

all that you can ask or think; and in all future time you will, with hearty thanks to God, look back upon this Sabbath, and this week, and this academic year, as *a new and happy era in your Christian life.*

So, through the great mercy of God, may it be with all the Students and all the Instructors of this sacred Institution.

SERMON CLXXXV.

In the forenoon my address was to the students of this Seminary generally. My present remarks will be adapted to those who contemplate engaging in the missionary service, and to others interested in the great cause of evangelizing the world.

First, *to those particular students whose purpose it is to engage in the missionary service.* We rejoice, dear friends, and give thanks to God, that your hearts have been moved with compassion to the perishing heathen. You have already made it a matter of frequent inquiry, what are the necessary qualifications of missionaries, and what is the spirit of mind which they ought to cherish. On this subject, which is too large to be particularly discussed at the present time, I shall aim only to impress upon your minds a few of those thoughts which are suggested by this very solemn occasion. An event of a sorrowful and appalling character has been announced to you,—an event unknown in the history of missions of late years, and of very rare occurrence for many centuries. Two young missionaries, of amiable manners and unexceptionable character, and urged on by Christian love to seek the good of those who are perishing in ignorance and vice, have been suddenly cut off by an act of the most shocking barbarity. Consider this, ye who have devoted yourselves to the service of Christ among the heathen. By this event you are carried back to primitive times, when it was nothing uncommon for missionaries to suffer martyrdom. How fondly have we been hoping that such times were for ever gone by. And the feeling may have found a place in our hearts, that as there are fewer trials and dangers to be encountered now, than formerly, lower qualifications in missionaries will be sufficient. If so, then may not God have permitted the awful event for the very purpose of correcting this hurtful mistake, and making a more just impression on our minds as to the proper character of missionaries, and the views and feelings which should govern their conduct? You now see, perhaps in a more striking light than ever before, that as they who engage in the missionary service must die, and may die at the very commencement of their work; those who are looking forward to that service ought, by all means, to be in a state of preparation for the kingdom of heaven. And you well know that the grand article of preparation is, that you be truly converted men, born of God, living Christians,—having your hearts so purified by faith, and so changed into the holy image of God, that you may be at all times ready for your departure. You see also, that as peculiar difficulties and perils may lie in your path, you ought to be armed with invincible courage and patience and trust in God, and so be prepared for trials the most sudden and severe. To prepare yourselves

for the self-denying and laborious work which you contemplate, accustom yourselves to strict self-denial and hard labor. Banish for ever the love of praise, the love of promotion, and a worldly spirit in every form, as totally uncongenial to the nature of the missionary enterprise. Let your heart be possessed with so strong an affection for the heathen, and so earnestly pant after their salvation, that the difficulties and sacrifices associated with the missionary work may lose all their terror, and even become attractive. Do you think that Lyman and Munson were afraid of danger and suffering? Had they known the mortal violence that was coming upon them long enough beforehand to make it a subject of deliberate reflection, would they have repented of having devoted themselves to the missionary service? Now, while preparing for that service, ponder well the trials to which you may be exposed. Count the cost. Regard sacrifices and sufferings as constituting a substantial part, and not an unwelcome part, of the life of missionaries. Be ready to follow Christ to prison and to death. The true missionary spirit showed itself in Paul, when he said to his sorrowing friends who were anxious for his safety,—“What mean ye to weep and to break my heart? for I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus;” and again, when he said to the Philippian Christians,—“Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice, and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all.” If you would achieve great and noble deeds, prepare for great and severe trials. If you would be *strong to act, be strong to suffer.* Never think of enlisting in this holy warfare without a cordial readiness to endure affliction. Let your minds be so thoroughly informed and settled on this point, that no danger or suffering can ever move you. Have that steady faith in God, and that unquenchable love to the souls of men, which are proper to the ambassadors of Christ; and then what has taken place on the island of Sumatra will have no power to disquiet your minds, or turn you back from your holy enterprise. The world is to be converted; and the last command of the risen Savior is, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” It is not,—Go preach the gospel *so far as you can without exposing yourselves to suffering and death.* It has no such condition. It is peremptory. “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.”—The early propagation of the gospel cost thousands of lives. The mere profession of Christianity, even when made in the most noiseless, inoffensive manner, was attended, in instances which cannot be numbered, with deprivations, imprisonment, tortures, and death in its most frightful forms. But did the prospect of such sufferings prevent ministers from preaching the gospel, or private Christians from adhering to it? Did their conscience bend or their hearts grow faint under persecution? No, never. Persecution did indeed help to draw the line between true and false professors. When afflictions came on account of the word, those who were not of the fold of Christ, generally drew back. So it would be now. Should dangers and troubles multiply, and should the powers of the world and the powers of darkness gain the ascendancy in every missionary field, and breathe out threatenings and slaughter against the preachers of the cross; what think you would be the effect of all this upon the number of missionaries? Weigh the question well. Would their number be increased, or diminished?—It is not to be doubted, that such a prospect of persecution and suffering would intimidate and drive back those,

who had contemplated the missionary work from worldly, selfish motives. But would it intimidate the true soldiers of the cross? Would it turn back those whom God has called by his grace to go forth in his name? Do you not speak of the courage of the warrior, who meets undaunted the opposing army, and faces the cannon's mouth? But the courage of the Christian missionary is of a higher order. It springs from nobler principles. It is sublime and heavenly. Nothing can subdue it. It is in close alliance with the omnipotence of God, and can no more be overcome, than Omnipotence itself. The prospect of persecution and suffering, instead of disheartening those who have the true spirit of ministers and missionaries, would quickly rouse them to new fervor of prayer, to new zeal, resolution, and effort. And such a prospect would exert a most happy influence also upon many private Christians. It would cure their worldly spirit. It would strengthen their faith, and raise their love to a higher, purer flame; and thus would induce them to come forth, and join the host of missionaries and martyrs. The only loss then, which would be likely to result from persecution, would be the loss (if loss it would be) of those who never loved the cause of Christ, and were not worthy to be intrusted with the treasure of the gospel; while there would be great gain from the increase of holy zeal and resolution in those already devoted to the work; and gain too from the awakening of that purer and stronger affection in private Christians, which would induce many of them to make a free-will offering of themselves to be the messengers of Christ to the heathen.

Had I time, I would recite to you what the Apostle says to the Hebrews of the sufferings of the people of God in still earlier periods; how they were tortured, not accepting deliverance; had trial of mockings, and scourgings, and imprisonment; were stoned, were sawn asunder, were slain with the sword; wandered in deserts, in mountains, and in caves; being destitute, afflicted, tormented. Those sufferings were repeated in the apostles' days, and afterwards; and Christians patiently endured them. And is not Christianity the same now as it was formerly? Is not faith the same? Is not love to God and to the souls of men the same? Nay, rather,—*is not the power and grace of Christ the same?* Do you think, then, that the prospect of danger, and even the most violent storm of persecution raised against ministers and missionaries, would prevail to turn them back from the service of Christ? No, through the grace of God, severe sufferings would produce the contrary effect. Is not this the very thing that is needed to break us off from our vain worldly hopes, and to bring us up to the measure of primitive faith and devotion? And if missionaries, and all the friends of the missionary cause, were only brought up to the proper measure of piety; they would do more to advance the real, spiritual interests of the church in one year, than has been done for many years past, amid all the zeal which has shown itself in the cause of human salvation.

Again: Permit me to say, that the recent events of divine Providence contain lessons of serious moment for *our Missionary Board and its Officers, and for all the friends of missions in our community.* God never administers chastisement without a reason. The various trials allotted to *individual Christians*, are unquestionably such as they need, and such as will, in the end, conduce to their spiritual good. And does not the church and the religious community, and every

society of Christians, as obviously need correction from God in their associate capacity, as Christians do in their individual capacity? Having long been connected with the BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS FOR FOREIGN MISSIONS and its Executive Officers, and having been intimately associated with them in their efforts to evangelize the heathen, I may be allowed to say, that I never knew a body of Christians who exhibited more of the upright and disinterested spirit of our religion, or deserved more of the public confidence. But yet that same Missionary Board, and its Officers, and the religious community which they represent, are all, in the sight of God, very far from perfection, and all need chastisement from his hand. They certainly need it, or God would not administer it. What then are some of the wrong tendencies which appear among the particular friends and promoters of our Foreign Missions, and which the late mournful events are suited to correct? and what are the ways in which these events may be rendered profitable to them?

First: These events should teach us and our fellow-Christians *to be humble, and to acknowledge our dependence on God.* The friends and patrons of the Missionary cause are, like other good men, exposed to *pride* and *self-confidence*. Who does not know the effect of prosperity upon the human heart? Those divine favors, those manifestations of the love and grace of God, which ought to excite the purest, warmest gratitude, are frequently turned into occasions of self-complacency and vain boasting. This is the case, more or less, with all Christians, and even with ministers of the gospel. Let any one of them be distinguished a little for his gifts or his services; let him have a little more success than others in doing good; or let him see more than others of the glory of divine power and grace in the conversion of sinners; and in all probability, his heart will soon begin to swell with feelings of self-importance and vanity; and by and by, he will make it manifest, that he thinks highly of himself, and expects to be esteemed and honored above his brethren. Those commendations from man, and those favors from God, which should make him feel that he is nothing, inflate him with pride. It is not in man, even when sanctified in part, to enjoy continued prosperity, or to possess any thing which is excellent, without danger of being lifted up. How was it with the Apostle Paul, when he was caught up to paradise, and saw and heard unutterable things? We might suppose, that so eminent a saint, after having been favored with such privileges, would always maintain the most exalted views of God; and that after having seen himself brought before the glorious Majesty of heaven, he would ever after appear little and vile in his own eyes, and would exercise a more profound humility than ever before, and be in no danger of pride. But he frankly tells us that, *lest he should be exalted above measure through the abundance of revelation*, there was given him a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan, to buffet him, *lest he should be exalted above measure.* He must have something to keep down pride. Brethren, let us bring the matter home to ourselves. When we read, or think, that the Foreign Mission from America commenced here; that this Seminary has been distinguished for a Missionary spirit,—(though alas! we have really had but a small portion of that spirit,) when we think that the greater part of the missionaries have been educated here, and that some of them have been eminent for their talents, piety, and usefulness; and when we are told to what an extent the dependence of the Board for Missionaries is still upon this Institution; have

not some feelings of sinful self-complacency stolen into our hearts? We ought to render thanks to God for his goodness in giving us an opportunity to do any thing for the spread of the gospel; and, at the same time, to be penitent and humble that we have done so small a part of what we ought to have done. But, instead of this, have we not at times been disposed inwardly to congratulate ourselves, and to lift our heads high, as though we were entitled to special honor? Has not God's all-searching eye beheld more or less of this sin in our hearts? And has he not seen it necessary, on this account, to visit us with severe chastisement?

Farther: When the Missionary Board, and the religious community that have sustained their operations, have seen the great work going on from year to year with increasing success; when they have heard of the hundreds of thousands contributed to this object, of the hundreds of missionaries employed, the great number of stations occupied, and the high estimation in which our missionaries and our labors are held in other countries; have they not been conscious of some stirrings of heart contrary to the lowliness of Christian piety; some of that arrogance which God's soul hateth? And has not God, in the recent dispensations of his providence, been doing just what was necessary to correct this sin, and to make his people feel that they are nothing, and that he is all in all? Is it not for this purpose, that so many of our missionaries have been left to sicken and die? that in some of our missionary stations there has been so little success in converting the heathen; and that some of our missionaries have failed to exhibit that zeal, and self-denial, and persevering diligence, which we expected of them? Is it not for this purpose also, that in less than fourteen years God has taken away three Secretaries of our Missionary Board,—a WORCESTER, an EVARTS, and a CORNELIUS,—names that will ever be precious in the annals of the church?* And is it not for the same holy purpose, that the late heart-rending stroke,—the violent death of our missionaries,—has come upon us?

And is it indeed so, that our vanity and self-confidence, and our unmindfulness of the grace of God, have rendered it necessary that we should be visited with these severe and awful chastisements,—the death of so many missionaries, and of so many chief agents in the missionary cause, and the disappointment of so many hopes as to the success of the gospel in pagan lands? Let the thought of this fill us with shame and penitence, and bring us upon our faces before God. And henceforth may we, and all the friends of missions, *be clothed with humility*,—the only garment which it will ever become us to wear.

The events which have occurred are eminently suited to withdraw our confidence from every arm of flesh,—to check undue reliance upon human instruments and human efforts, and to bring us to look to God alone, and to put all our trust in him.

If we could look to no higher power for the conversion of the heathen, than the power of missionaries; what would become of our hopes, when missionaries die? Far from our minds then be the thought, that the salvation of those who are lost, depends ultimately on these feeble, frail instruments. God could, if he pleased, work without any instruments whatever; or if he employed instruments,

* Had this sermon been delivered a fortnight later, it would have been the painful duty of the preacher to add the name of our respected and beloved WISNER to the list of deceased Secretaries. Three have now been taken from us in four years.

he might employ those of far higher qualifications, than imperfect, dying men possess. Why then has God chosen to make use of imperfect, dying men, as agents in carrying on his work of grace? Is it because he has not sufficient resources in himself, and stands in need of our help? Why, really, it seems to me, brethren, that for God to take such poor, weak, sickly things as we are, and make us in any measure fit for his service, and then sustain us in it, costs him, (if I may so speak,) costs him far more, than it would to do the work himself, without any agency of ours. Certainly the infinite God, if he pleased, could at once, by a special revelation, communicate the knowledge of the gospel to the minds of the heathen, and by his Holy Spirit could effectually induce them to accept it, and so give them eternal life, without making any use of the labors of gospel ministers. Let him only speak the word, and all this would instantly be done: just as he said, "Let there be light, and there was light."—For God to take human beings, so ignorant, so sinful, so unfit for his service, and to prepare them for the work of the ministry; to bear with their pride and unfaithfulness, with their mistakes, and all the faults of their character; to support them in their labors; to call them back from their wanderings; to watch over them and guard them every moment, and by the exertion of his own omnipotence, to render their poor services successful;—all this is surely a great work. Yes, I repeat it,—for God to make use of such feeble, imperfect instruments in saving souls, requires more agency on his part, than to save them without any instruments whatever. Evidently, then, his employing such instruments cannot be designed to diminish his own agency. It does in fact greatly increase it. For now, according to the plan which he has adopted, he does *himself*, by his own special agency, convert and save perishing men,— (which he might easily do at will, without any instrument,)—and in addition to this, he takes us, who are "but dust and ashes," into his service, and by his great power and mercy helps us along, constantly working in us to prepare us to act for him, and then working in the souls of sinners by us,—and that, too, when our miserable labors are frequently nothing but a hinderance to his own gracious designs. No, brethren, God does not call us into his service to supersede or diminish his own agency. He does it for exactly the opposite purpose. It is the very *nature* of God, and the *pleasure* of God, to *act*. And to *act* as he does, is his *glory*. It costs him no effort, like what *we* call effort, to put forth his almighty agency. It is easy for God to create millions of worlds, and to sustain them by his arm, and move them in their orbits for ages of ages, without any cessation. It is perfectly easy for him to do all this, and to do it for ever, if he pleases. Most surely then, the infinite God, in accomplishing the work of redemption, does not bring the power of men or angels into action, to prevent the necessity of exercising his own power; but for the very purpose of *exercising it on the largest scale*,—for the purpose of *putting forth his own wise and benevolent agency to the most glorious extent*. For God to act thus is to act like himself. According to this exalted principle, so different from the narrow, scanty principle which governs man, God did not choose that plan which would require the *least* of his agency, but that which would require the *most*. The whole complicated machinery of the natural world, in great things and in little things, is such, as constantly to call forth and display the infinite power of God. He loves to exert his infinite power; and he loves to *display* it too,—not indeed for his own benefit, but for ours. Accordingly, if God is pleased to make use

of instruments in saving sinners, we are not to imagine that he will choose those of the highest order—those indued with perfections the nearest to divine; because, if such exalted agents should come out between God and us,—small and feeble as we are,—the grandeur of their character, and the dazzling splendor of their operations, might completely fill the narrow field of our vision, and hide the glory of God from our view. We are rather to conclude, so far, at least, as the benefit of human beings is concerned, that God will choose instruments which have no overpowering grandeur of character,—instruments stamped with insignificancy, (such as we are,)—instruments altogether inadequate, of themselves, to accomplish the work designed,—instruments so imbecile, and so manifestly insufficient, that the whole world shall be compelled to look through them, and above them, to a divine agency, and to give glory to him “who worketh all in all.”

It is nothing against these views, that the angels are “ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation.” They are indeed ministering spirits. But their agency is all concealed from our view. For what reason? Why are we not permitted to behold those benevolent beings who are thus active in doing us good, that we may love and honor them, as we do the ministers of the gospel? May not the reason of this be found in the imbecility of our nature, and in our danger of being overawed by the majesty of angelic appearances, and of being drawn into idolatry? Who of us could guard against agitation and terror, and maintain composure of mind, if, like some saints of old, we should have a vision of angelic beings? Angels can behold angels, without danger. They have stronger minds than we. When the most resplendent instruments come out clearly to their view, they can see God through them, and in them,—and can see more of God, because the instruments he employs are more glorious. But is it not otherwise with us? Are we not always in danger of looking even upon a mortal like ourselves, if a little distinguished by the lustre of his character, with an excessive and idolatrous veneration?

The principle above stated is exactly the one which the apostle brings out, when, speaking of the gospel ministry, he says, that “God has committed this treasure,” not to creatures of exalted rank, as he might have done, but “to *earthen vessels*,”—for this very purpose, “that the excellence of the power may be of God, and not of us.” The weakness and frailty of the instruments are to turn off the eyes of all men from them to God, and to make it manifest, that he does the work, and deserves all the praise.

Such is the view which the scriptures give of the agents that God employs, and the reasons why he employs them, in the work of saving sinners. Such, also, is the view inculcated upon us by the events of divine providence, particularly by those which have recently taken place. The missionaries whom we send forth are “earthen vessels;” the most healthy and vigorous of them are frail as the grass. They may be quickly wasted away by sickness, or still more quickly cut off by the violence of men. And those of them who are most conspicuous for their piety, are subject to many weaknesses and imperfections. Let us, then, never place our reliance upon feeble human agents, but upon God, the Almighty Agent, “of whom, and through whom, and to whom, are all things.”

But let not the events which have come to pass, however painful and humbling, have any effect to *discourage* the devoted friends of

the missionary cause. 'These events are appointed as the means of improving their characters, of increasing their fitness for the great work, and so of leading on to greater success in the end. There is something very animating in that principle of God's providence, which makes great disappointments, adversities, and sufferings,—events which try the souls of men,—the means of bringing about great results. We see that no enterprises of extraordinary moment are carried forward smoothly and easily. Nor is it in this manner that men are prepared for such enterprises. Greatness, whether in character or in the objects accomplished, is invariably associated with difficulties, and often with what the world calls disasters. May we not, then, be permitted to indulge the cheering thought, that the various adverse and painful events which have met us in the missionary enterprise, are in reality expressions of the divine favor, and are clear indications, that the work in which we are engaged is one of singular grandeur, and that our humble endeavors for the salvation of the heathen are to be crowned with ultimate and glorious success?

The present occasion leads us to contemplate a *profound mystery of divine providence*,—a mystery as great and unfathomable, as any of the doctrines of our religion. At the present day, almost two thousand years after Christ made propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and after so much has been done by apostles, and martyrs, and other servants of God, and so many prayers have been offered up for the spread of the gospel, and when we have been inclined to think that the darkness is almost past, and the universal reign of Christ near at hand,—there is still on the island of Sumatra a tribe of cannibals,—a million of human beings so savage and cruel, that they murder their fellow-men, even those who come to them on an errand of the purest love, and then, horrible thought! devour their mangled, lifeless bodies.—Where now,—we might be ready to ask,—where is the God of infinite power and grace,—where is the God who has all hearts in his hand, and who has mercy on whom he will have mercy,—that men should any where be found possessed of a character so unutterably base and dreadful? Or if they are found, where is the God of justice, that they are not instantly cut off?—But this mystery does not end with the cannibals existing in Sumatra, and in other parts of the earth. It extends, in all its unsearchableness, to the whole heathen world. Why is it,—(I do not utter the words irreverently, but to show that we are of yesterday and know nothing, and that God's ways are past finding out,)—why is it that even at this day three fourths of the human race are left in heathen darkness, having never known the name of the only Savior of lost men? Why has not God caused them to hear the glad tidings, when at any time during the ages of darkness that are past, he could have raised up unnumbered ministers, and sent them forth into all lands, and could have made the gospel preached by them, effectual to their salvation;—yea, when he could have saved them with infinite ease, if he had seen fit, without the labor of any ministers? Why has he suffered so great a part of this world to remain a barren, frightful wilderness, when it has been in the power of his hand to make it a fruitful field?

It explains no part of this mystery to say, *that the heathen are moral agents, and that God treats them as such*. It is indeed very plain, and what no man ever doubted, that the heathen are moral

agents. But what if they *are moral agents*? They are no more so than *our own forefathers* were. But when God sent the gospel to our idolatrous forefathers, and converted them, he surely did it without injuring their *moral agency*. And if he had pleased, he could just as easily have converted any other part and every part of the heathen world. Who can suppose that any greater measure of divine influence, or any greater display of divine grace, is necessary to save those who are now pagans, than was necessary to save our pagan ancestors? There can be no doubt, that the Almighty God, had he chosen to do it, could long since—could at any time—have given to his Son the heathen for his inheritance, and brought the uttermost parts of the earth to submit to his peaceful reign. The question which involves the mystery is, why has not God *chosen* to do it, and why has he not put forth that act of his power and grace needful to bring it to pass?

Nor does it clear up the mystery at all to say, that *the Christian world has been in fault*; that if they had been as benevolent and active and faithful, and as fervent in prayer, as they ought to have been; the sound of the gospel, accompanied with the power of the Holy Ghost, would long ago have reached all nations. I admit this. Still the great question remains: Why has not God *made* the Christian world thus benevolent, and active, and faithful, and fervent in prayer? Why has he not actually raised up well qualified ministers in sufficient numbers to accomplish the mighty work of the world's conversion? He raised up Paul and the other apostles; and he raised up Luther and Calvin, and a multitude more. And he could have raised up others in any numbers he chose, as easily as he raised up these. He could have raised up a hundred as easily as ten, and a thousand as easily as a hundred. God has had power to carry his word and his saving work long ago into the midst of China. He has had power to turn the heart of the Emperor and of all his officers to embrace the Christian religion, and to labor for its diffusion through the empire. He has had power to establish churches, schools, colleges, and seminaries there, which should long before this have raised up millions of devoted Christians, and educated thousands and thousands of faithful ministers,—yea, enough to supply the whole empire, and to send the gospel to all the surrounding countries. The mystery of mysteries is, that God, with his infinite power and wisdom and love, has not done this. And the mystery of mysteries this will doubtless be to us, till we have minds large enough to comprehend the infinitude of God's attributes, and the whole system of his works through all past and all future time. The inspired writers do not answer, and do not attempt to answer, the questions which may be raised respecting this subject, or respecting the conversion of some sinners in Christian lands, while others are passed by. They attempt to solve no part of this great mystery. They teach us, what is highly important for us to know, that God, in all these things, *acts "according to the counsel of his own will," and that his will is infinitely wise and good,—and there they leave the subject* ;—and they leave it there, that the lostness of man may be brought low, and that God alone may be exalted.

I shall touch upon one point more, and that is *the true spirit of the Christian religion*—so widely, so totally different from the spirit of the world. A tribe of cannibals in Sumatra have inhumanly killed and devoured our beloved brethren, who went there from the purest

benevolence. What now shall we do to avenge the innocent blood of these missionaries? Shall we petition our government to send forth an army to inflict signal punishment upon those monsters of cruelty, and to teach them, that American citizens cannot be injured with impunity? Or shall we pray God to send down fire from heaven to destroy them? No, brethren. The God whom we worship, is *the God of love*. And our Savior, infinitely merciful himself, requires all his disciples to copy his example, and to cherish a benevolent, compassionate, forgiving temper towards the worst of the human race. And when, after his resurrection from the dead, he commissioned his apostles to go forth to preach the glad tidings of salvation to all the world, he directed them to *begin at Jerusalem*, where so many prophets and messengers of God had been killed,—yes, he directed them to begin the work of benevolence *at Jerusalem*, in the midst of those who hated him, and had shed his blood! Behold the true spirit of our religion! It is the spirit of meekness, gentleness, and forgiveness. It is the spirit of love—love to enemies, to persecutors, to murderers. Guided by this spirit, let us meditate no return to those who have massacred our beloved missionaries, but to labor and pray for their eternal welfare. Let the officers of our Missionary Board take special pains to send the precious blessings of the gospel to the island of Sumatra, and to the Batta territory in the interior of that island, the place where *LYMAN* and *MUNSON* were slain. And let the missionary, selected for the purpose, be solemnly instructed to preach the gospel to the inhabitants of Sumatra, *beginning at Batta*. With holy confidence in God, let that missionary go forward to his work of mercy among those poor, wretched cannibals. And let him search out the very men who murdered our brethren,—yes, let him be sure to search them out, and begin with *them*. As they are first in guilt and wretchedness, let him first seek their good. With a heart that pities them, and longs for their salvation, let him proclaim to them the glorious gospel:—*Behold I bring you glad tidings. Open your ears to the message of divine love. Jesus died for sinners, for the chief of sinners; and he is able to save to the uttermost. I offer you pardon in his name; pardon for blood-guiltiness, and for all your crimes. Those Christians who sent me to you, have no feeling of revenge. They ask nothing of you, but that you would look unto Jesus, and be happy for ever in his kingdom.* Thus let him preach to those degraded, miserable heathen, the unsearchable riches of Christ. And if the grace of God should touch their hearts, and bring them to repentance,—and if they should at length be seen at the feet of Jesus, weeping for their sins, and weeping too at the thought of his dying love, and devoting their whole souls to him, and then going about to tell their companions in guilt, that they had found the **SAVIOR**, and proclaiming his abounding grace to all around them;—Oh! this would be a spectacle, at the sight of which angels would rejoice, and the report of which would fill the hearts of ten thousand believers with holy gladness. And could those two missionaries, now we trust in heaven, hear the blessed tidings of the repentance of their *murderers*, how would they join with the angels in their rejoicing, while with a pure, Christ-like spirit, they would feel willing to go down again to earth, and bear the pains of a hundred deaths, for the joy of beholding such precious fruits of God's Spirit, and such glorious triumphs of his grace, in the salvation of sinners!